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ABSTRACT

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Transdisciplinary Integrative Methods for Special Education Programming

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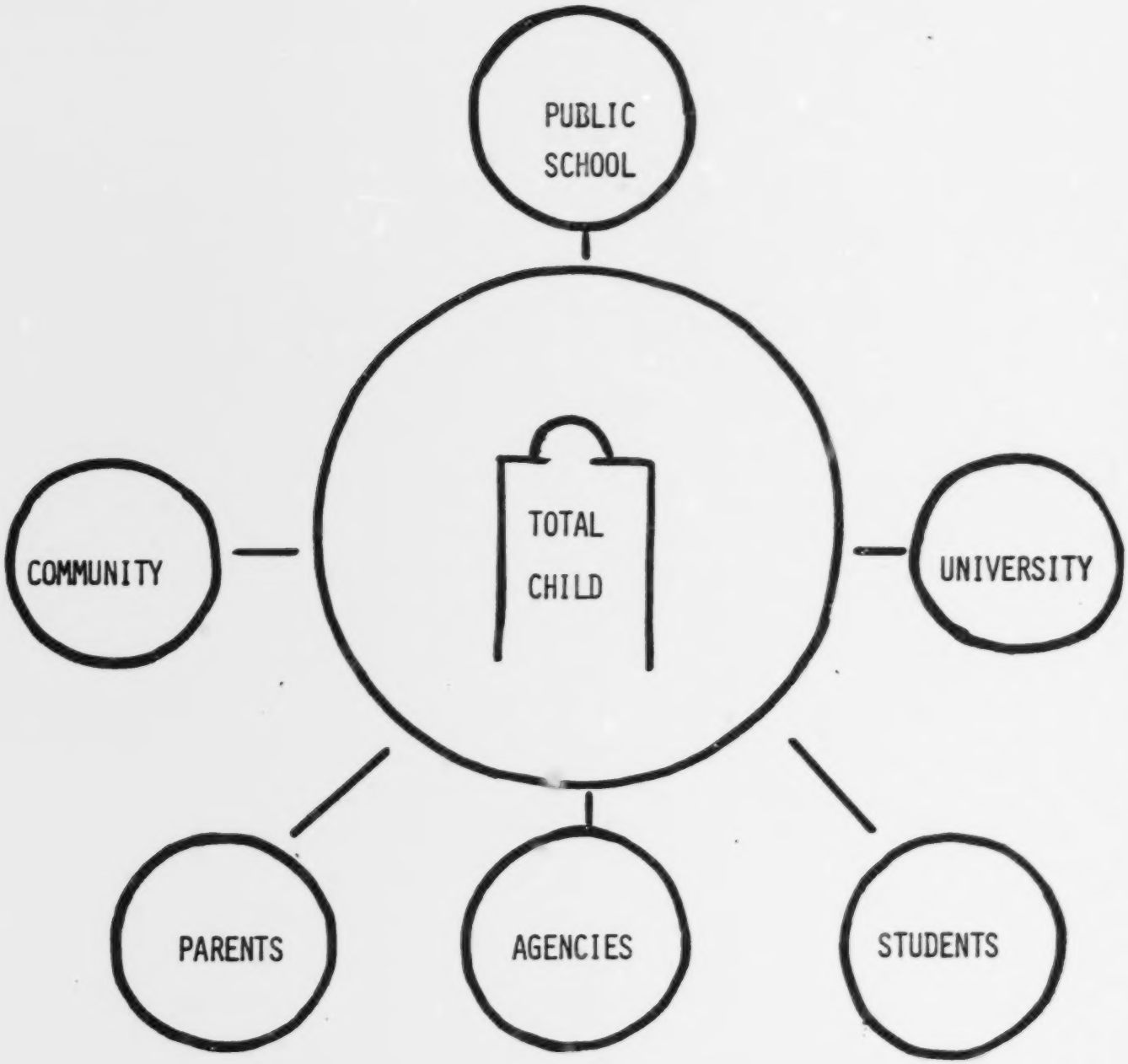
TRANSDISCIPLINARY EFFORTS IN INTEGRATIVE LEARNING

FOR

THE TOTAL CHILD



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Author Notes

Beverly J. Klug is a former Assistant Professor of Education at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford, Oklahoma. The TLC program for preschool handicapped children, which is the topic of the article, was developed under her leadership as Coordinator of the Training and Learning Center in conjunction with Patricia G. Morrison and other members of the Special Education Preschool Committee. Ms. Klug is currently an Assistant Professor of Education at Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho.

Patricia G. Morrison is the Director of Special Programs/Counselor for the Weatherford Public School system in Weatherford, Oklahoma, as well as the Coordinator for the Child Service Clinic located on the University campus. She has also been a member of the adjunct faculty for the College of Education at Southwestern Oklahoma State University.

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Abstract

The Training and Learning Center (TLC), located on the campus of a small regional University in Western Oklahoma, provides a unique opportunity for Special Education majors to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The TLC program incorporates a transdisciplinary approach, utilizing the services of specialists in the fields of speech and language therapy, audiology, physical therapy, and counseling in integration with special education programming for preschool handicapped children.

The program is a cooperative venture between the local public school system and the University. Supportive interagency efforts are also an important component of the program. The goals set forth for the program include: (1)making all education majors aware of handicapping conditions, (2)providing Special Education majors with specific skills to work with the children, and (3)ultimately to provide smooth transition for the handicapped child into the public school system. This program has been cited as a model program for the State of Oklahoma.

Introduction

Special Education majors at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, located in rural Western Oklahoma, are given the unique opportunity for combining theory and practice as they acquire teaching skills for working with special populations at the Training and Learning Center (TLC) located on the University campus. TLC provides an experiential approach for transdisciplinary efforts in integrative learning for the total child (See Figure 1).

In accordance with Oklahoma state law and federal law, PL 94-142, children with identified handicapping conditions must be served 0-21 years of age. TLC is a cooperative venture between the Weatherford Public School system and the university. The Weatherford Public School system acts as the fiscal agent for the Child Service Clinic, a federally funded preschool incentive project serving eight counties in Western Oklahoma. The Clinic is housed in the TLC facility. Preschool children in need of related services are referred by the Child Service Clinic personnel to TLC. Participation in the program provided at TLC fulfills

course requirements for Special Education majors attending the university.

The Preschool Program

The preschool program began during the Fall of 1983 as a pilot program with the initial primary goal of integrating various areas involved with serving exceptional children. This was to be done with the view of educating Special Education majors about the needs of handicapped children, services that were available for these children, and how they could work in a cooperative manner as teachers of exceptional children with specialists providing services. A secondary goal was to provide education majors in general at the university with an opportunity to observe Special Education majors working with handicapped children. Because of the rural nature of the area, a majority of the students at this university have never come into contact with handicapped children. It was surmised that by completing observations of the program in conjunction with the Exceptional Child (3132) course, education majors would receive exposure to and develop an understanding of handicapping conditions which

influence their attitudes in a positive direction toward handicapped children. Both of these goals have been accomplished to a great degree as evidenced by verbal and written comments made by students working in the preschool and students making observations of the program to the professors and specialists involved in TLC.

During the past 1984-85 academic year, the program at TLC has expanded from 3 children and 14 Special Education majors to include 6 children and 25 Special Education majors (14 during the Fall semester and 9 during the Spring semester). Special Education students enrolled in either the Strategies of Learning Disabilities or Strategies of Mentally Handicapped courses are expected to spend two hours per week in the Center, for a total of approximately 24 hours during the semester. Students work in two-hour time blocks, from 1-3 p.m., and the program is in operation four afternoons a week. Many of the students will be involved in the program for two semesters as they seek certification both in the Learning Disabilities and

Mentally Handicapped programs. It should be noted that there are no restrictions placed on the type of exceptional child who is eligible for the program. Many exceptionalities have been represented by children attending the program, including mentally handicapped, speech and language disabilities, cerebral palsy, emotionally disturbed, and disabilities in combination with hyperactivity.

Students working in the program are supervised by a faculty member from the Department of Elementary and Special Education at the university. The faculty member acts as Coordinator of the program, supervises students, and serves as Master Teacher for the program making sure that the needs of the preschool children are being met by the students assigned to work with them. This includes providing assessments for the children, appropriate daily lessons, and scheduling IEP and Annual Review meetings with parents and representatives of the local school districts.

The preschool children enrolled in the program have been referred by the Child Service Clinic on the basis of need. The children all receive services

provided by the clinic for Speech and Language, Physical Therapy, and/or Audiology. The Special Education majors working in the TLC program provide the children with programming in the areas of pre-reading, pre-math, language development, science, creative play, art, music, and development of fine and gross motor skills. In addition, the affective domain is addressed through development of self-concept, interests, and expression of feelings.

As an added bonus, students enrolled in the Music Therapy program at the university have the opportunity to complete one of their practicum experiences at TLC. Though it is not always possible to have Music Therapy activities on a daily basis, the students provide activities for the children which promote the development of concepts and fine and gross motor skills, as well as self-expression and memory development.

Integration with the Child Service Clinic

The Child Service Clinic is a federally funded project begun in 1978 when funding was made available to the Oklahoma State Department of Education, Special

Education Section, for development of regional programs serving the needs of preschool handicapped children. The grants are regionally competitive. As a result of the grant which has been awarded consecutively since 1978 to the Child Service Clinic, preschool children from eight counties in Western Oklahoma receive free related services. Over the eight-year period of the clinic's existence, the need for these services has been unequivocally established.

Services provided by the clinic specialists include counseling, referral services and parent group support in addition to the services mentioned above. The clinic staff participates in the assessment, IEP writing and re-evaluation of the educational programs offered for the preschool children enrolled in TLC and maintain remedial services for each child in his/her specific area of need. The staff also participates in a solidified agency support system in order to provide services for families with handicapped children in this very rural area, as often great distances between agencies are involved (See Figure 2).

To meet the goals established for the TLC program,

Special Education majors meet with the Child Service Clinic personnel six times during each semester. During those visitations, the specialists orient the students to their individual disciplines, including sharing techniques that are used with the children they see. The specialists also talk with the students about the children they are working with in TLC and how they can carry therapy over into the classroom with the children. Procedural safeguards, such as maintaining confidentiality, are upheld at all times.

Benefits of the Program

The benefits of the program are multitudinal for all involved in the program. Special Education majors are given a unique opportunity to experience working in their profession prior to their student teaching experience. This in turn equips them for handling children with many types of handicapping conditions and for working with other professionals involved in the field. For students enrolled in the Music Therapy program, having the experience of working with preschool handicapped children offers opportunities for growth in their field which would otherwise not be available. The Child Service

Clinic personnel are given opportunities to share their expertise, educate future colleagues about their profession, and hopefully develop relationships with students that will carry over to their work in the public schools when the students become involved in the school system as teachers.

University professors also benefit as they can relate information concerning various handicapping conditions in a much more realistic fashion for their students, whether in the Exceptional Child classes or the strategies classes. Parents have allowed permission to speak about their children in presentations to students, and students are simultaneously instructed in the provisions for confidentiality regarding exceptional children. Having contact with the TLC allows professors to remain abreast in their field.

Despite the amount of time involved in observations for non-Special Education majors, students have reported that they were glad they were able to make the observations. Many felt that they understood the field of Special Education much better and that they had lost their fear of working with handicapped children in the

classroom. A small percentage have gone on to make a change in their major areas of study to enter the field of Special Education as a result of making the observations. In general, it has been noted that the students who are making observations many times form a kind of bond with the children they are observing and will inquire about them even after their observations are completed.

Finally, the benefits for the children involved in the program are great indeed. Children who started out in the beginning of the school year with many problems in the areas of social, emotional, and cognitive skill development have made gains in all areas as evidenced by observations and formal assessment. In fact, two of the children from the past year will be mainstreamed into regular Kindergarten with their own age-mates, which everyone at TLC takes pride in noting. Parents, too, benefit as they see their children receive the type of programming that can make a difference in the futures of their children. They learn to be proud of what their children are capable of accomplishing, and are more understanding of their limitations. They also receive

support from all those connected with TLC as they learn more about their children's handicapping conditions and that a handicap in one area does not mean limitations in all areas.

Some of the moments of the greatest sense of accomplishment for the writers came during the past semester (Spring 1985) when students who were observing stated that the TLC program looked like any other preschool or Kindergarten program and that they couldn't tell any differences between our handicapped children and non-handicapped children in what they were able to accomplish in the classroom. It was only after explaining the difficulties that each child had to overcome that the students could understand why these particular children had been selected for the program. For those involved in making decisions regarding the TLC program, those messages said a great deal about early intervention and the benefits of transdisciplinary efforts in providing for the needs of our exceptional children.

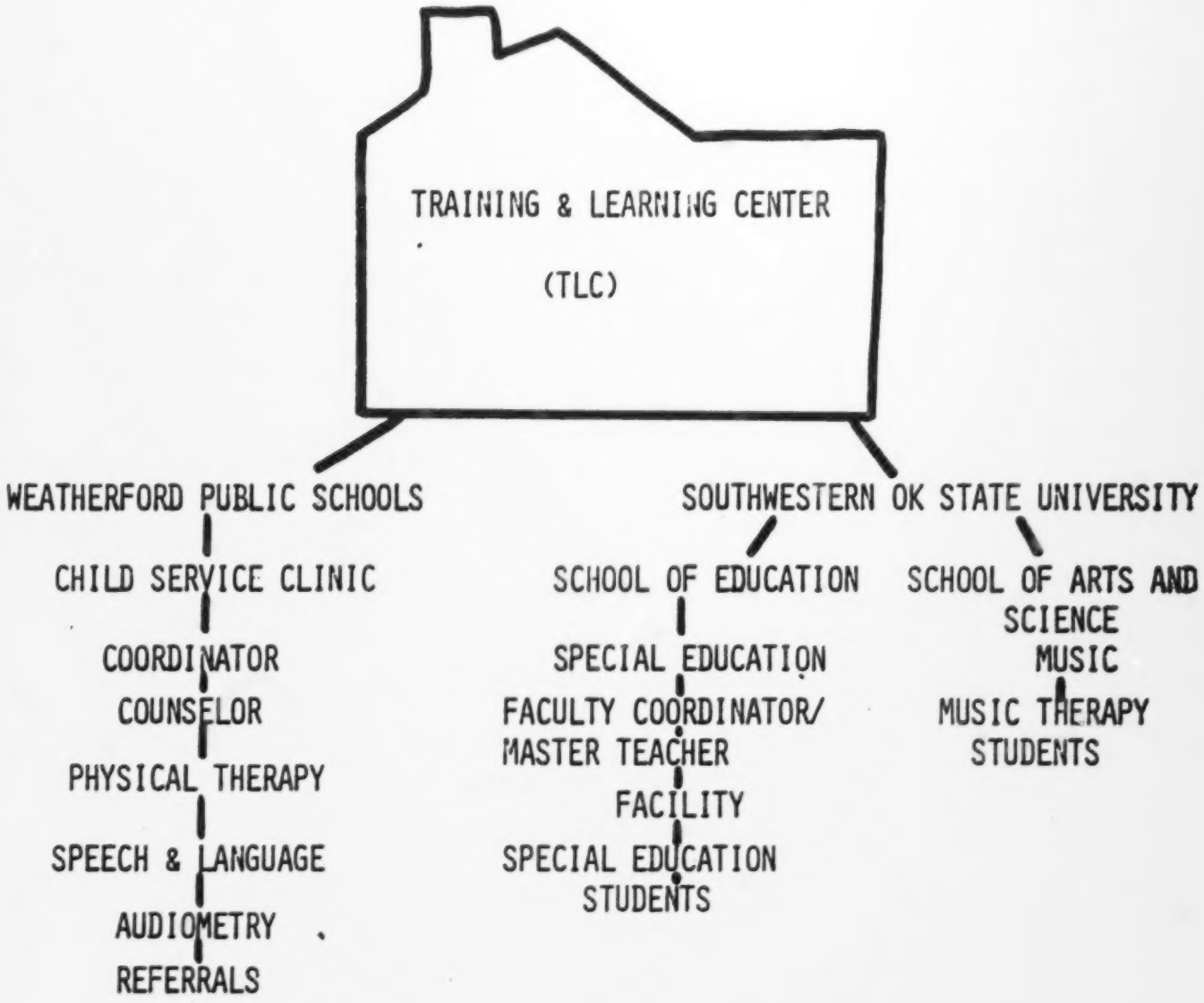
TRAINING & LEARNING CENTER
(TLC)
WEATHERFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
CHILD SERVICE CLINIC
COORDINATOR
COUNSELOR
PHYSICAL THERAPY
SPEECH & LANGUAGE
AUDIOMETRY
REFERRALS
SOUTHWESTERN OK STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL EDUCATION
FACULTY COORDINATOR/
MASTER TEACHER
FACILITY
SPECIAL EDUCATION
STUDENTS
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND
SCIENCE
MUSIC
MUSIC THERAPY
STUDENTS

FIGURE 1

INTER-AGENCY TEAM

NETWORKING FOR THE TOTAL CHILD

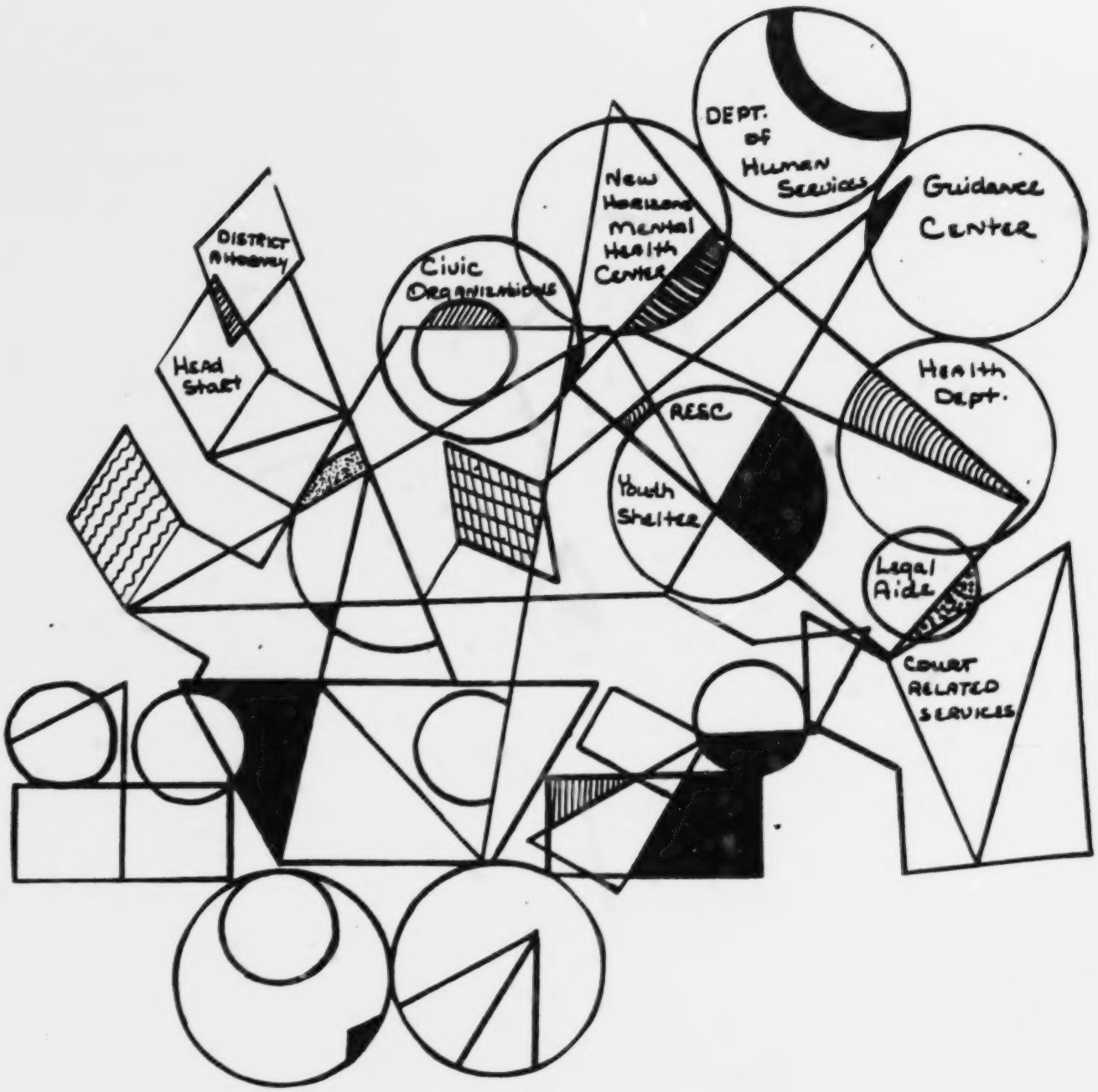

FIGURE 2